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## £EQUATORIAL GUINEA

### @Arrests in December 1992 and January 1993

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Since the introduction of a multi-party political system in Equatorial Guinea in January 1992, hundreds of people have been arbitrarily arrested and detained for short periods of time for belonging to or supporting opposition political parties. Almost all those arrested in 1992 were subjected to ill-treatment or torture, some sustaining severe injuries. Few were formally charged or tried. The government of Equatorial Guinea has promised to respect human rights but its actions have contradicted these promises. There is now a strong possibility that the United Nations Commission of Human Rights will consider Equatorial Guinea under its agenda item 12 (which deals with violations of human rights in specific countries) during the Commission's 49th session from 3 February to 15 March 1993.

This brief report updates a report published by Amnesty International in January 1993, *Equatorial Guinea: Political reforms without human rights - "What do human rights have to do with democracy?"*. (AI Index: AFR 24/01/93), which describes the systematic violation of human rights by the security forces in Equatorial Guinea during 1992, and the failure to bring these forces within the confines of the law. In particular the present report provides details about mass arrests in December 1992 and January 1993.

**Human rights violations in late 1992**

Over 150 people, including students, teachers, members of political parties and priests, were arrested on 17 December 1992 following a student demonstration in the capital, Malabo. The demonstration was held to protest against the detention of **Celestino Bacale**, a teacher and member of the *Convergencia para la Democracia Social* (CPDS), Convergence for Social Democracy. Celestino Bacale had been arrested on 10 December 1992, Human Rights Day, and accused of insulting the ruling *Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PDGE), Equatorial Guinea Democratic Party, which is led by President Obiang Nguema, and for allegedly issuing verbal death threats against someone. It was his third arrest in 1992.<sup>1</sup>

As the demonstrators were passing peacefully through Malabo's market place, police arrived and broke up the demonstration, using considerable violence: demonstrators were clubbed and traders' stalls were overturned. The government justified the excessive force by claiming the demonstrators had vandalised the market place and intimidated the traders. However, numerous other reports suggest that it was the security forces who carried out the violence and were responsible for looting.

Among those arrested on 17 December 1992 were dozens of teachers including **Andrés Esono Ondo**, **Juan Nzo Ondo**, **Angel Obama** and **José Luis Elema Borengue**, the brother of **Joaquín Elema Borengue**, a former prisoner of conscience who was released in January 1992 in a general amnesty<sup>2</sup>. Other well-known critics of the government, including several leaders and members of opposition parties and two Catholic priests, were also arrested on 17 December although they had not been taking part in the demonstration: they were apparently suspected of complicity with the demonstrators.

Celestino Bacale was released during the demonstration on 17 December and arrested again less than an hour later. After his release at 3.15 p.m. Celestino Bacale went to the house of **Arsenio Moro**, a relative and also a member of the CPDS. At about 4.00 p.m., just as the two men were beginning to have a meal, police arrived and arrested both of them.

There is ample evidence that most, if not all, of those arrested on 17 December 1992 were ill-treated or tortured by members of the security forces during their detention. There were reports of medical personnel being present at their torture. Some of the detainees, including Andrés Esono Ondo and the two Catholic priests, fathers **Luis María Ondo Mayé** and **Pedro Ncogo**, were tortured with particular severity and sustained serious injuries which required medical treatment.

Celestino Bacale and Arsenio Moro were also severely tortured: Celestino Bacale became unconscious several times during the beating and torture and sustained kidney injuries and Arsenio Moro suffered a perforated eardrum and broken ribs. Celestino Bacale

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<sup>1</sup> see *Equatorial Guinea: Political reforms without human rights*. ("What do human rights have to do with democracy?") (AI Index: AFR 24/01/93)

<sup>2</sup> See *Equatorial Guinea: Six prisoners of conscience* (AI Index: AFR 24/04/93)

has stated that during torture a military nurse gave him several injections of what he thought could be a powerful analgesic and another one which was an antibiotic.

Most of those detained were released between 19 and 21 December 1992 following protests from foreign governments. Celestino Bacale, 11 teachers and nine students remained in detention, some in Black Beach prison, until 27 December 1992 when they were released on the orders of President Obiang. Celestino Bacale and the other 11 teachers were dismissed from their posts and banned from teaching anywhere in Equatorial Guinea. Some, including Celestino Bacale, are scheduled to stand trial.

## **Trials**

In October 1992, **José Martínez Bikie**, a member of the *Unión Popular*, Popular Union, who had been arrested in Bata the previous June, was tried on charges of insulting the Head of State and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience.

Eight members of the *Partido del Progreso de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PPGE), Equatorial Guinea Progress Party, who were arrested in early September 1992 and later released on bail, were tried in early December 1992 for resisting arrest. Three were sentenced to four months in prison and to pay a fine, the others were acquitted. Amnesty International is concerned that they were unfairly tried and that they may be prisoners of conscience. Amnesty International is also concerned that none of the police who arrested these PPGE members in a violent and arbitrary manner appear to have been the subject of any disciplinary proceeding or brought to justice.<sup>3</sup>

## **Arrests in January 1993**

In 1993 Amnesty International has received further reports about the arrest of members of opposition parties and of people who refused to join the PDGE. In mid-January 1993 several members of the opposition parties grouped in the *Plataforma de Oposición Conjunta* (POC), Joint Opposition Platform, were arrested in Bata, the capital of the Litoral province on mainland Africa, while they were meeting to discuss the recently promulgated electoral law<sup>4</sup>. Among those arrested were **Angel Masie Ntutumu, Norberto**

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<sup>3</sup> An account of the cases leading to these two trials is contained in *Equatorial Guinea: Political reforms without human rights - "What do human rights have to do with democracy?"*. (AI Index: AFR 24/01/93)

<sup>4</sup>The electoral law was approved at the beginning of January 1993 by the *Cámara de Representantes del Pueblo*, Chamber of People's Representatives, the Equatorial Guinean parliament. It had been drafted by the government without the participation of the opposition parties and limits the right to be a candidate to those who have resided in Equatorial Guinea continuously for five years, thus excluding many opposition figures who have lived abroad.

**Nsue Micha** and **Jesús Ela Abeme**, all of whom had been restricted or detained for political reasons in 1991<sup>5</sup>. The organization does not know the precise reasons for their arrest nor whether or not they have been released.

In mid-January 1993 **Weja Chicampo**, a member of the CPDS, was arrested in Baney on Bioko island and then transferred to the neighbouring village of Riaba, where he was briefly detained for his political activities in favour of the CPDS. He was released on bail but banned from returning to Baney. Weja Chicampo was accused of dividing the local community and discrediting the PDGE, making it difficult for this party to recruit members in the area. There is growing evidence that the PDGE's Political Information and Awareness Committees have been intimidating people into joining the PDGE. For example, members of the Political Information and Awareness Committees are reported to have turned up at people's homes in the middle of the night and ordered them to sign up as PDGE members.

### **Recommendations**

Amnesty International remains concerned about continuing human rights violations in Equatorial Guinea and the government's lack of will to put an end to the pattern of arbitrary arrest and torture of political opponents. The organization is now calling on the Equatorial Guinean government to release all those in prison on account of their non-violent opposition to the government. Amnesty International urges the authorities to:

- stop detaining those who criticise government policies or are suspected of doing so;
- stop torturing prisoners and detainees;
- to ensure that any official suspected of committing human rights abuses is the subject of an official investigation and brought to justice and fairly tried.

**KEYWORDS:** ARBITRARY ARREST1 / TORTURE/ILL-TREATMENT / POLITICAL ACTIVISTS1 / TEACHERS / RELIGIOUS OFFICIALS - CATHOLIC / PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE / REARREST / TRIALS / PROFESSIONAL ETHICS / DEMONSTRATIONS / POLICE /

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<sup>5</sup> For details on these cases see *Equatorial Guinea: Arrests of pro-democracy activists - a changing pattern of human rights violations* (AI Index: AFR 24/03/91) published in November 1991